THE SITE OF CHICAGO

The Chicago Region in Prehistoric Times

OCTOBER 6, 1945

LOOSELEAF No. 114

The Site of Chicago

Valparaiso system of moraines in the Chicago region

Long before the days of modern Chicago—the great city symbolized by skyscrapers, elevated trains, busy crowds of people, and booming industries—there was another Chicago, the village of the pioneer settlers. Even before that, this site at the southern end of Lake Michigan was the location of Indian settlements. But many millions of years ago, there were no towns. Neither were there people. There was not even a Lake Michigan.

In those days, vast, warm seas many times larger than Lake Michigan covered this area, and the deposits left by the seas are now the limestone bedrock of the Chicago region. The fossil remains of many animals that lived in the seas can be found preserved in this bedrock. Around Chicago it is almost entirely covered by a deep layer of unassorted rocks and sand called "glacial drift," which was brought down from the north by the glaciers that covered the Chicago region millions of years after the seas had disappeared.

These glaciers, great sheets of ice about a mile thick, originated in the northern part of the continent and moved southward. As they traveled, they removed the soil and gouged out the bedrock. They gradually collected a load of dirt and rocks which they pushed and carried down into Illinois and several states to the east

and west. The front of the glacier was broken up into uneven lobes or fingers. In Illinois, the longest of these fingers reached into the southern part of the state. Finally, after a long period of cold, the climate became warmer; the glaciers began to melt; and the load of dirt and rocks they had brought with them was deposited in a thick, uneven layer over the bedrock. The retreat of the glaciers was not continuous. It consisted of a series of advances and retreats, and wherever the edges of the ice remained for a period of time, rocks and other material carried by the glacier were deposited as ridges that are called moraines.

The largest and highest of these moraines in the Chicago area is the Valparaiso. Its outer border is a few miles to the west and south of Chicago and its course may be traced southeastward from the Chicago area into Indiana and then northeastward into Michigan. At no place is it more than twenty miles from the lake. In width this moraine varies from ten to twelve miles. It is not a continuous ridge but rather a complex arrangement of hills and depressions which together form several broad ridges and hills and valleys.

Within the Valparaiso moraine was built a later one, the Tinley. Between these two is a belt of lowland which includes Tinley Park, Palos Park, Harvey, Steger, and Dyer. This lowland belt was once a chain of shallow lakes that appeared first when the melting glacier was building the Tinley moraine.

When the glacier had retreated north of the present site of Chicago, water flowing from the retreating ice formed Lake Chicago (early Lake Michigan). This lake covered the entire Chicago region. There were three stages of Lake Chicago, each of which had a different level. Shore lines formed during these three stages are still visible in many places in the Chicago region.

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CHICAGO
"PLACE OF THE SKUNK WEED"

by

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CHICAGO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
RESEARCH EDUCATION
FOUNDED 1893 BY MARSHALL FIELD

Museum Stories, Series XLV, No. 2

OCTOBER 13, 1945 LOOSELEAF No. 115

Chicago—"Place of the Skunk Weed"

A Potawatomi chief

The Chicago region used to be inhabited by Indians who belonged to the great Algonquian family. Among the different branches of the family living in the country that is now Illinois were the Illinois Indians and the Miami and the Potawatomi.

The Illinois Indians were probably the first historic inhabitants of a large territory south and west of the Great Lakes. They called themselves "Iliniwek" or "I-ni-ni," an Indian word meaning "men," which may imply the idea that they felt themselves to be superior to other men. The French, who were among the early settlers of the western Great Lakes area, gave the name a French spelling and pronunciation, "Illinois."

Many different tribes of Algonquian Indians lived around the southern end of Lake Michigan, their territory extending farther south and west into what is today the state of Illinois and south and east into Indiana.

But the principal Indians who lived in the Chicago region (that is, Greater Chicago and the territory within a radius of fifty miles north, west, and south of the city) were the Potawatomi, who held the area from about 1700 to 1833, when, by the westward movement of the pioneer settlers, they were forced to leave. They were the last of the Indian tribes to leave Illinois.

The Potawatomi were regarded as "good friends and bad enemies," an opinion held both by other Indians and by the early settlers. They were the first Indians of the region to form an alliance with the French and the first to establish trade with them. They became masters of the fur trade and of the entire Chicago region, a position that gave them great importance because it meant that they dominated the well-known and valuable land portage between the Great Lakes and the river systems. Chicago was a busy place, even in Indian times, for many Indians from other regions passed through Chicago to make the land portage that would take them from the Great Lakes into the Illinois River and on into the Mississippi, down which they could travel, if they desired, all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

The area at the southern end of Lake Michigan was known to the early French settlers as Chicagoua. The exact meaning of the name is uncertain and always will be a subject for argument. But perhaps the word Chicagoua is derived from the word "She-kah-ko-he-wug," a word of Algonquian origin meaning "place of the skunk." Probably it refers not to the animal called the skunk, but to the skunk weed or onion weed, a plant that has a strong odor resembling somewhat the odor of the skunk. Onion weed grows abundantly in the area.

Modern Chicago has many evidences of the early Indian inhabitants. Clark Street used to be an old Indian trail. Billy Caldwell's Forest Preserve on the northwest side of the city was named for a famous Potawatomi chief, known to the settlers as Billy Caldwell and to the Potawatomi as Sagaunash. He was born in Canada, the son of an Irish father and a Potawatomi mother and lived in Chicago from 1820 to 1831. His wife was a daughter of another Potawatomi chief, Neescotnemeg, one of the famous members of the tribe.

Many of Chicago's streets bear Indian names such as Michigan, Oneida, and Winnemac.

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INDIAN HOMES IN CHICAGO

by

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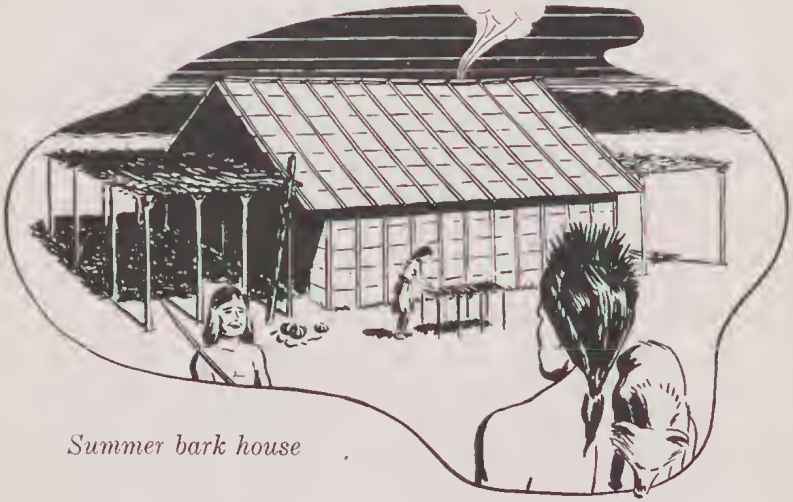
Museum Stories, Series XLV, No. 3

OCTOBER 20, 1945 LOOSELEAF No. 116

The leaves of the poplar were beginning to fall, and along the borders of the swamps the elm and hickory were turning yellow. After a late season, the rushes were finally ripe for picking; so the Potawatomi women,



Summer bark house

in their summer village on the shores of *Michigami*, sent notice to the chief woman that they wanted to go to the marshes to gather rushes for the mats to be used on their winter wigwams.

Agreeing that it was the proper time, the woman leader gave her permission at a special feast and led the procession to the edge of the swamp. There the squaws erected a temporary camp and prepared another feast. Next day, at the water's edge, the chief woman prayed to the lake, to her clan's ancestors, to the sky, the earth, the water, and to the manitou or spirit of each direction. Then she entered the swamp and cut the first rushes.

After the ceremony, the other squaws began their work. Wading into the water, they carefully selected the cattails that had not gone to seed, tied them into bundles, and stood them up on the south side of the wigwams. Next morning, before the sun had reached

the stacked rushes, the women were busily dipping the ends of the bundles into scalding water. When enough rushes had been prepared to supply the need for winter mats, the squaws fastened their loads of baggage and rushes to their pack straps and started back to the village.

When the mats had been finished, a day was set to cut poles for the lodge. The squaws trimmed and peeled the slender saplings so that the poles would not tear holes in the mats. Working in a group, the women bent the peeled saplings, lashing them together for the upright frame. They completed the dome-shaped framework by tying other saplings around it.

Then the women draped the mats over the framework, starting at the base so that the overlapping mats would shed rain and snow and keep out the winter winds.

During the winter, when game grew scarce, the squaw rolled up the cattail mats, took down the poles, and tied the load to her pack strap. Fastening their snowshoes the family set out for new hunting ground.

This time the wigwam was erected as quickly as possible. A hearth was built in the center under the smoke hole. The flap over the smoke hole was closed, and a buffalo robe was hung over the door to keep out the snow driven by a howling wind. Snugly inside, the family arranged the household articles on low couches around the walls. Under the couches extra objects were stored away, and a supply of firewood was stocked in the lean-to attached to the lodge.

In the spring the family and the others of their "clan" returned to their permanent camp on the shores of *Michigami*. Here they lived in a summer house rectangular in shape and covered with the bark of hickory, elm, and black ash. Children darted among the scattered trees of the clearing. Braves told stories of the hunt, and women planted the clearings with maize. The sound of laughter and chatter echoed from the arbor that shaded the door of the bark house.

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FOODS OF THE EARLY CHICAGO INDIANS

by

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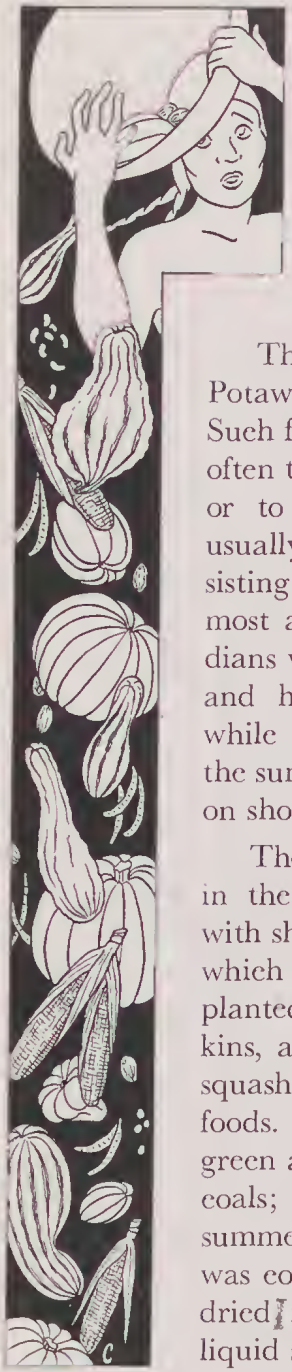
Museum Stories, Series XLV, No. 4

OCTOBER 27, 1945 LOOSELEAF No. 117

Foods of the Early Chicago Indians



Two whitefish boiled in water

The tongue and breast of a deer

Two wood hens, the hind feet of a bear, the tail of a beaver

Quantities of broth made of several sorts of meat

Beverage: maple syrup beaten up with water

This was the menu for a 4-course Potawatomi feast many, many years ago. Such feasts were given for various reasons, often to celebrate a successful hunting trip or to welcome strangers. Meals were usually simpler than this, however, consisting of the foods in season and those most abundant. Our early Chicago Indians were mainly farmers in the summer and hunters in the winter. However, while the women tended the gardens in the summer, the men had some time to go on short hunting trips.

The women started their gardens early in the spring; they worked the ground with sharpened sticks and made holes into which they dropped the seeds. They planted corn, beans, squashes, pumpkins, and melons. The corn, beans, and squashes were the most important garden foods. Some of the corn was gathered green and roasted in the husks on the hot coals; this was a special delicacy in the summer. Often the young tender corn was cooked with the squash, and fresh or dried meat added; this made a sort of liquid stew.

Fall was a busy season; the ripe corn had to be gathered, husked, and hung up to dry. Some of it was ground into corn meal and stored away. The pumpkins and squashes were cut into disks, which were dried and stored for future use. Wild berries such as blueberries were gathered and dried. Nuts and edible roots such as water lilies and bullrushes were gathered and added to the storehouse of food.

After all the crops had been harvested, the men, women, and children strong enough to march moved into the woods for the winter. Only the old men and women were left behind in the summer villages. The hunting groups often consisted of several villages and they moved from place to place as they followed the game. The men and boys killed buffalo, deer, elk, bear, beaver, otter, wild turkeys, and other fowl, as well as many fish. Whatever fresh meat was not needed immediately was smoked, dried, or broiled to preserve it; no salt was ever used by the Indians in curing meat.

After the winter months of hunting and moving, the Indians began to return to their summer villages. In February they tapped the maple trees, collected the sap, and boiled it into maple syrup and sugar. Still later in the spring the Indians gathered the first tender shoots of various plants such as dandelions and ferns. Cooked for a few minutes, they made delicious greens.

The most typical Indian meal consisted of one course or dish made of corn. Whatever meat, fish, vegetables, or fruits were available were added according to taste. It was called sagamite, and it could be prepared in at least twenty different ways, varying according to the contents. For a beverage the Indians often made a tea of young leaves of sassafras. In the winter when these were not available, they used small twigs.

If these early Chicago Indians had plenty of corn, beans, and squashes, they felt they had enough of the necessary foods.

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CLOTHING OF THE EARLY CHICAGO INDIANS

by

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NOVEMBER 3, 1945 LOOSELEAF No. 118

Clothing of the Early Chicago Indians

Mikana, Daughter of the Path, was planning to make a dress. Like all the Potawatomi women, she always wore the same style—a long-sleeved, loosely fitting, knee length garment made of two or three

Mikana sewed the seams of her dress with a bone awl and sinew. Then she decorated it with porcupine quillwork.

pieces of skin sewn together at the shoulders and down the sides, belted at the waist and lined from the waist to the knees.

Her new dress was to be made of thick, tough buckskin, which would keep her very warm all winter. Her husband, Animiki, Son of the Thunder, had brought home a buck deer from the hunt, and Mikana was using the skin for her dress. But first she would have to remove the hair and then prepare the skin so that it would be comfortable to wear.

She put the hide into a kettle of water to which she had added some wood ashes, so that the hair would come off easily. Then she removed the deerskin from the kettle and began to scrape it with a flint tool to remove the hair and particles of flesh from the under side of the skin. After it had been cleaned, Mikana tanned and softened it by smearing the brains from the buck deer over the skin and rubbing them in with a piece of deer's rib. It was a tedious task, but Mikana worked at it patiently, for she knew that it was the best way to tan and soften the hide. The Indians had learned that in every animal there was a sufficient quantity of brains for them to use in tanning its hide.

Using a stone knife, Mikana cut out her dress and then sewed the seams with a bone awl and sinew. The dress was almost finished. How should she decorate it? Should she trim it with some of the new, bright blue and green and red and yellow beads which Animiki had received from the French traders in exchange for mink pelts or should she use the porcupine quillwork which her people had used for many generations? Finally she decided to decorate her dress with the porcupine quills and to use the beads for embroidering bright flower designs on a new pair of moccasins. She dyed the quills many colors—red, yellow, blue, purple, orange, brown, and black—using dyes made from the plants that grew close by, such as yellow dock, golden seal, and pokeberry. She also used cedar bark and juice from the walnuts. After the quills had been dyed, she flattened them with a piece of deer's rib and then they were ready to be used. With a small bone awl, she punched rows of holes in the buckskin and laced the quills through them, so close together that they gave the appearance of the stitching used in monograms.

She put bands of quillwork around the bottom of the skirt and around the yoke and the sleeves. Now at last her dress was finished.

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INDIAN TRANSPORTATION

by

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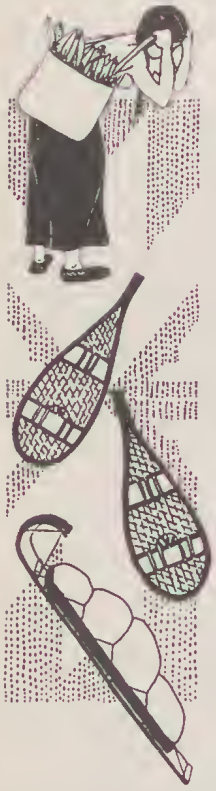
CHICAGO
NATURAL HISTORY
MUSEUM
RESEARCH EDUCATION
FOUNDED
1893
BY MARSHALL FIELD

NOVEMBER 10, 1945 LOOSELEAF No. 119

Indian Transportation

The Potawatomi Indians, who lived in the Chicago region many years ago, were great travelers. Of course they didn't take 1000-mile trips or such long voyages as we might take today; but considering the fact that they had only their own feet, canoes, snowshoes and toboggans to help them in their journeys of 100 miles or so, they were great travelers.



Women carried bundles on their backs or pulled them on toboggans. All the family used snowshoes for winter travel.

These Indians were strong and sturdy marchers. They had to be in order to get enough food. The men walked many miles in hunting animals for food and in the fall of the year all the people in the village except those too old to walk, marched into the woods and moved from camp to camp all winter long. As they started this fall moving the babies were fastened onto their cradle boards and tied on their mothers' backs. The other women and girls carried the baggage; each bundle was strapped to the woman's back by means of a tump line, which went around her forehead. The men and boys walked in the lead always on the watch for enemies or game.

As soon as winter came the men fashioned snowshoes for all the Indians, so that they could move more quickly and silently over the snow as they hunted the animals or moved to a new camp. They also made toboggans out of thin pieces of wood and the women pulled the baggage instead of carrying it on their backs. Always the men went ahead with weapons for protection.

During the summer months the women and girls stayed in the villages and took care of the gardens but the men and boys went out on short hunting trips.

They often travelled on the rivers and lakes in canoes. For river travel they used the dug-out canoe because it was durable and could stand blows from protruding rocks, branches, and tree trunks. A dug-out canoe was hollowed out of a single log; often the center of the log was set on fire and allowed to burn until it could be hollowed out easily. Then the inside was finished and smoothed down by chiseling it with an adze. While the dug-out canoe could stand many knocks it was cumbersome and not too speedy.

The bark canoe was light in weight but was a fragile boat. When possible, birch bark was used; otherwise the bark of the elm tree made a fairly good canoe. Birch trees did not grow in this Chicago region so the Potawatomi traded with the northern Indians to obtain birch bark. The canoes varied in size from very small ones to large ones that were sturdy enough to have crossed Lake Michigan if necessary. It is believed that some of these early Indians traveled in canoes as far north as Green Bay. Later many tribes of Indians came through this region in canoes, traveling by rivers and lakes. The canoes were heavily loaded with baggage and frequently the canoes and baggage had to be carried over the portage from lake to lake or river; these bark canoes were so light in weight that a man could easily carry one.

A bark canoe

In later years our Chicago Indians became even greater travelers, moving north in the spring and summer and south in the fall and winter. Most of this transportation was done on the lakes and rivers.

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HOW POTAWATOMI BOYS WERE BROUGHT UP

by

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NOVEMBER 17, 1945

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How Potawatomi Boys Were Brought Up

The Prairie Potawatomi were very patient with the faults of their boys. Children were never whipped, but for such an offense as carrying a tale or visiting in other

Migwan and his uncle studied the habits of animals

lodges a boy might be deprived of food for a whole day. An unruly boy might be ducked in cold water.

Migwan, "the feather," was named by his uncle, who thereafter was responsible for seeing that the boy was instructed in tribal customs and life. He was taught to call his relatives by the correct names. His father and his father's brothers he must call "father." He was expected to refer to his mother and her sisters as "mother." The children of his father's brothers and his mother's sisters were called "brother" and "sister." He learned that his clan was the *Kakak* (Duck Hawks).

Migwan never tired of hearing stories of war or the hunt, but best of all he liked to go with his uncle into the woods to learn the habits of animals. One day Migwan and his uncle sat silently watching the woodchucks. Suddenly the shy creatures disappeared into their burrows. When Migwan and his uncle returned to the village they discovered what had frightened the woodchucks. The village was astir with excitement, for visitors had arrived from a distant tribe.

Next morning as Migwan, bow in hand, stood watching the guests eat the feast prepared by the woman

Mikana, he saw a band of hunters leave the camp in search of deer. Immediately he forgot that he had been thinking how greatly honored Mikana must feel to be asked to prepare a feast for the guests. Migwan even forgot the guests.

Walking boldly into the woods, he imagined himself as leader of the band. He gathered a few sticks and stones, wrapped them in a big burdock leaf, and pretended he was a clan bundle owner, for to be chosen leader of the hunt a brave must own a "magic bundle" and be a successful hunter.

Migwan had been learning to shoot squirrels with his bow made from the wood of the mulberry, and he decided to try for deer. The clump of alders at the bend of the river would be just the place to hunt deer; so Migwan led the way for his imaginary band of hunters.

Sitting down on a stump and pulling his moccasined feet up in front of him, Migwan remembered what his uncle had told him about the deer hunt. He pictured his band of men sitting around him as he reminded them about the rules of the hunt. Migwan's uncle had said that this must be done before men start to hunt.

Jumping down from the stump, Migwan walked stealthily through the woods. When he heard leaves rustle or branches rub together, he knew his band of hunters was scattered about him as they should be. Shooting an arrow at a large toadstool, Migwan gave a whoop which echoed through the woods. This was to let his hunters know he had killed a deer. They would come running, for it was a rule of the hunt that the first to arrive at the scene skinned the deer and divided the meat with the slayer.

By this time Migwan was wishing his deer were ready to eat. He picked up his bow and hurried back to his father's lodge. He was so hungry that he never even thought of stopping to visit at the other lodges.

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POTAWATOMI CEREMONIES

by

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NOVEMBER 24, 1945 LOOSELEAF No. 121

Potawatomi Ceremonies

Medicine bundle of otter skin, used in connection with the Medicine Lodge ceremonies

At the site of modern Chicago, there once lived the Potawatomi people, a branch of the Algonquian Indians. They were divided into totem groups that bore such names as raven, bear, buffalo, and hare. Each totem had its own sacred animal and believed that it had descended from that animal.

The name Potawatomi means "People of the Place of Fire." According to Potawatomi legend, they were the chosen people of their god, the leaders of other tribes, and therefore the guardians of the sacred fire.

The religion of the Potawatomi included a belief in a Great Spirit and in gods of the fire, sun, sea, and the four directions, North, East, South, West. There was also an evil power in the water, "the great horned water-panther." They believed, too, in an afterlife, saying that the human spirit followed a trail across the heavens over the Milky Way and into the good land beyond in the western sky, where they would have a happier and better life than the one they had left. This land was ruled by the great Teibiabos, who had a brother, Wisakä, a legendary hero of the Potawatomi.

They believed also that plants and animals possessed

special power of a religious nature—the manitou. Worship of the manitou or spirits was a highly important part of the Potawatomi religion, and the power of the manitou was expressed by the sacred clan bundles, around which many tribal ceremonies centered. Each clan had a sacred bundle containing various objects which the Indians believed would give them special power and success. Each bundle had a legend connected with it. Some of the bundles were supposed to have been given to the tribe by Wisakä; others were said to have been acquired or made as the result of dreams; and still others were believed to have been the gifts of the Great Ancestors who began the tribe. In connection with the ceremonies of the bundles, dog meat was eaten.

Perhaps the most important of all of the Potawatomi ceremonies were those centering around the Medicine Lodge, a society organized for the purpose of prolonging life, curing sickness, and guarding the sacred tribal myths.

The Potawatomi also followed a Dream Cult, believing that whatever they dreamed they absolutely had to do, for they said that it was their spirit or manitou that gave them their dreams. The manitou was supposed to take care of them in everything they did. When a boy had reached the age of ten or twelve, his father said that it was time for him to choose his manitou. His face was then painted black with crushed charcoal, which was allowed to remain on the face for several days, during which time the boy was required to go without food, for it was said that without food the brain was "empty" and he could dream more easily. If he dreamed of the sun, or of thunder, or of some object, the thing of which he had dreamed was said to be his manitou. Thereafter, it was his lifelong protector, and during the remainder of his life he worshipped it by making sacrifices to it or by giving feasts in its honor.

These and many other religious beliefs governed the Potawatomi in every phase of their life.

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